

Against the Grain

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Group Therapy / BIP Prices

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they are? Why <Infotrac> and <ProQuest> instead of <Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature?>

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the following people who helped me "cross the bridge" — Marilyn Geller and Birdie MacLennan, who conducted a great workshop at the NASIG (North Ameri-

can Serials Interest Group) Conference, June 1993, and whose manual, <NASIGNET and Beyond>, has been extremely useful for learning how to deal with this stuff; John Kolman, of NOTIS Systems, Inc., who did a fantastic job of explaining many of these concepts and others at a LAMA (Library Administra-

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Group Therapy

Column Editor, Rosann Bazirjian (Syracuse University)

Hey y'all out there! Do you have any gripes or what? So . . . everything perfect? If so, tell us about it. Try LIBRVB@SUVN.bitnet or FAX (315) 443-9510.

GRIBE:

Submitted by Marlene Barnola, College of Charleston

Here is my gripe. When I check for the prices of some books in *BIP*, it says "write for info" rather than giving me a price. I don't like this because it's embarrassing when I'm asked right off for a price and I can't supply it. To top it all off, sometimes I call the publisher and he/she/they won't even supply a price. They take my number and tell me that a sales rep for my region will call me. What is this? If I don't know what something costs, how can I buy it? Why can't *BIP* give at least an "approximate" or "estimated" price?

BOWKER RESPONSE:

Submitted by Albert Simmonds, Managing Director, *Books In Print*, R.R. Bowker)

The editors of *Books In Print* are very aware of the importance of providing accurate prices along with the other bibliographic information listed in *BIP*. In fact, the two most important goals of the *BIP* editorial process are securing the correct price and the current status of each ISBN in the database (whether it is active, op or osi). To this end, Bowker is continually developing its technological capabilities so that important data such as prices flow from the publishers' systems into the *BIP* database. In addition

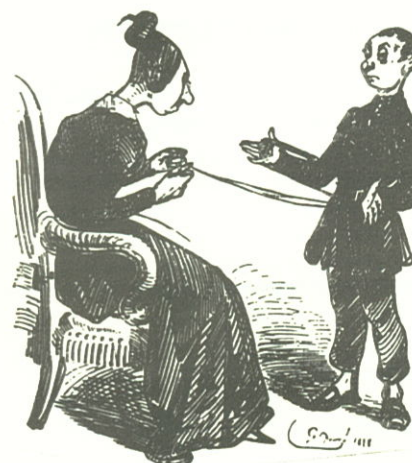
to the tapes and diskettes that are already being used for this purpose, Bowker is also developing EDI transfers from the publishers based on the newly approved BISAC X12 standards for bibliographic transfer. In using these tools the *BIP* editors insure that the *Books In Print* database mirrors the publisher data.

However, when this information is not available from any given publisher (a situation which arises for a variety of reasons), the editors have little choice except to advise the users of *Books In Print* to contact the publisher for the information that is needed. It would be tempting, of course, to resort to approximate prices, but this procedure would result in so many errors that any short-term advantage it might produce would be outweighed by its disadvantages. In addition, the *Books In Print* editorial policy mandates that the information in each bibliographic entry be verified by the appropriate publisher.

Given this need to list publisher supplied prices in *BIP*, what recourse does a user of *BIP* have when no price is available? If you will contact us (Fax # 908-665-3502), we will work directly with each publisher to provide you with prices and to add these prices to the database so that subsequent users will find them in the print and electronic versions of *BIP*.

VENDOR RESPONSE:

Submitted by Barry Fast, Vice President, Marketing and Sales, Academic Book Center



The reason publishers won't quote a price to you is that there is no price, or at least no list price. These books, primarily textbooks or books that are sold mostly through college stores, carry no list price so the stores can establish their own selling price. Since college stores are a kind of monopoly, at least in geographical terms (only one per campus, on campus), they can establish the list price that they want, one that gives them the profit that they need.

About ten years ago, college stores were complaining to publishers that they could not make a decent profit on the typical 20% discount they received on textbooks. They wanted more profit margin. But publishers were reluctant to raise their list prices and give the stores a higher discount because they would incur other higher costs that were a function of the list price, costs like royalties, agents' commissions, and sales commissions. Their solution was to sell the books

"net", that is, at a certain price called the "net price". These net priced books could then be sold by the stores at any price they wanted, provided of course the students' parents could afford to buy the books for their kids. By agreement, the publishers no longer showed a list price in *Books In Print* or in catalogs because there was, in fact, no list price.

The library market, as a percent of the total market for these books, is quite small. It is unlikely that publishers will react to your annoyance with anything other than a sympathetic shrug. Many library suppliers, however, have established list prices for these books in their databases and might be willing to answer an inquiring fax with the selling price for net priced books.

PUBLISHER RESPONSE:

Submitted by **Tara Catogge**, Sales Director, Academic Press

Academic Press recognizes our customers' needs for accurate and timely price information. With few exceptions we will not promote or announce a title without a price attached. This price is also uploaded immediately on to our customer order processing system and included in *BIP*. We've developed a very close working relationship with Bowker to ensure that accurate, firm and up-to-date information is included in *BIP*. New title information is sent monthly for books published within that period. An annual list of all books in print is sent to Bowker at the end of each year to update pricing information for all titles in print. The system we have in place for updating pricing information helps Bowker and our customers identify changes and update their records immediately. We also understand that incorrect information may be more harmful to our customers than no information at all. Therefore, preliminary prices are not sent to Bowker based on the tentative nature of the information.

Academic Press announces titles to the book trade three months before publication. Librarians receive this information via our *AP Report* that is published bi-monthly; jobbers get monthly packets of Advanced Title Information sheets. We have many control systems in place internally to ensure that when a title is announced it carries either a final price or a firm tentative price. We believe we have an excellent system in place that allows us to announce titles quickly that are subsequently published with few changes.

There is no excuse for poor customer service. Either publishers are not getting information loaded onto their systems quick enough, or they're promoting books without prices. We've tried over the years to develop a system sensitive to these issues. Although no system is foolproof, gripes such as this do (or should!) force us to continue to evaluate our internal systems. ☛



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